DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 442 CE 061 947

AUTHOR Seamon, Joan
TITLE Literacy Policy in the United States.
INSTITUTION Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 3 Aug 92
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented by the Director of the Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy at "Adult Literacy: An International Urban Perspective Conference" (New York, NY, August 3, 1992).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Adult Programs; Compliance (Legal); *Educational Policy; Educational Trends; Federal Aid; *Federal Legislation; Federal Programs; *Government Role; High School Equivalency Programs; *Literacy Education; Policy Formation; State Federal Aid
IDENTIFIERS *Adult Education Act

ABSTRACT

Since the enactment of the Adult Education Act (AEA) in the 1960s, the Federal Government has played a major role in leadership and policy direction for literacy education for adults. Federal programs and policies established under the Adult Education Act have influenced who provides services, who receives them, the instructional components of services, and how services are funded. Eligibility for literacy education under the AEA is limited only by the requirement that recipients must be at least 16 years old. The Adult Education Act program has three components: Adult Basic Education; English as a Second Language, the fastest-growing component; and Adult Secondary Education. Most AEA funds go to the states and are allocated to local programs using at least three basic criteria: past effectiveness, coordination with other community services, and commitment to serve the most educationally disadvantaged. Three major federal program initiatives, begun in the late 1980s, have had a tremendous impact on literacy policy: the National Workplace Literacy Grant program, the Even Start Family Literacy program, and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program. In the 1990s, federal policy has been expanded to include efforts aimed at program improvement. The expanded federal role in this decade will focus on four areas: research, technical assistance, coordination, and accountability. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ADULT LITERACY: AN INTERNATIONAL URBAN PERSPECTIVE CONFERENCE
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK CITY, AUGUST 3, 1992

PANEL 1: Literacy Policy and National Institutions

ED349442

Joan Seamon, Director
Division of Adult Education and Literacy
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C. USA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"LITERACY POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES"

Since the enactment of the Adult Education Act in the mid-1960's, the U.S. Federal government has played a major role in leadership and policy direction for educational services to adults who lack basic literacy skills. Unlike elementary and secondary education, where State and local structures existed prior to the Federal government's involvement, the public adult education system is in many ways a Federal creation.

Federal programs and polices, established under the Education Act, have influenced the nature of the delivery system--who provides services, who receives services, instructional components of services, and to a great extent, how services are funded.

With appropriations now totalling more than $270 million, the Act remains the largest, clearly-identifiable source of Federal funding: and these funds account for one-third of all public monies allocated for literacy services. The Act supports the only major literacy program open to all educationally disadvantaged adults broadly defined as

CE061947

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

those who lack a high school diploma or any adult who lacks the basic skills necessary to function effectively in contemporary society.

Basic Skills are defined, most recently in the National Literacy Act as "reading, writing, communicating in English, computation and problem-solving."

Eligibility for services under the AEA is circumscribed only by age - at least 16, or beyond the age of compulsory school attendance under State education laws. There is no income restriction.

The AEA program has 3 components: Adult Basic Education (ABE); English as a Second Language (ESL) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE). The fastest growing component is ESL, currently accounting for more that one-third of all services and reflecting the dramatic increase in immigration over the last decade. This trend was also significantly influenced by Federal legislation in the late 80s, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), that allowed undocumented aliens to apply for citizenship if they fulfilled certain English language and civics requirements. Indeed, since 1980, ESL enrollment has increased 183 percent, from 390,000 to 1.5 million. And this increase has been seen predominantly in large urban areas.

The bulk of the AEA funds go directly to the 50 States and 5 territories on a formula basis in the form of annual State Basic Grants. These monies are, in turn, allocated to local programs who compete for grant awards.

States may set criteria for the awarding of funds, such as those that ensure geographic distribution or set parameters for program size or teacher certification or the like. But participant eligibility, program services, administrative costs and use of funds, and at least 3 basic criteria for judging local grant applications are dictated by the Federal Act.

These 3 criteria include -

- The past effectiveness of programs in providing services, especially with respect to recruitment, retention and learning gains.

- The degree to which the programs coordinate with literacy and other social service agencies in the community.

- The commitment of the program to serve those <u>most</u> educationally disadvantaged.

Competition for literacy funds is fierce - and, as in the case of ESL enrollment increases - this is especially true of large urban areas.

For beyond administration of the AEA, the Federal role - since the early 80s - has expanded to include a vigorous campaign of public awareness, focused upon the economic and intergeneration impacts of adult illiteracy. Public, private and voluntary literacy program efforts have been encouraged, spawning a broad diversity of local providers. This campaign has also culminated in placing adult literacy as a highest priority at the Federal level, designating it as one of 6 National Education Goals in 1990; and including it as a major part of the AMERICA 2000 education strategy of the Bush Administration in 1991.

In the decade of the 80s, adult education and literacy began to break out of its position as a stepchild of the education system and come into its own.
Where the delivery of adult education services until then was largely the domain of local education agencies (public school districts), it now includes growing numbers of community colleges, community -based organizations, libraries, correctional institutions, businesses, labor organizations, job training agencies and public housing authorities.

Indeed, the most recent amendments to the AEA in the National Literacy Act reinforced the value and validity of this diversity by requiring that States "ensure direct and equitable access" to Federal AEA funds for a broad array of public and private nonprofit agencies. This will most significantly impact providers in urban areas, where diversity abounds.

And, of course, public awareness activities have resulted in concurrent increases in demand for services from those adults who had not been previously, but are now aware of learning opportunities. Long waiting lists at most urban area programs clearly reflect this outcome of public awareness.

Finally, three major Federal program initiatives, begun in the late 80s, have had a tremendous impact on literacy policy:

(1) The National Workplace Literacy Grant program which provides direct grants to partnerships of educational agencies and businesses or labor organizations to provide literacy training to current workers.

(2) The Even Start Family Literacy Program which supports a unified program of instruction including adult education for parents and

early childhood education for at-risk children.

(3) The JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) program - a welfare-to-work initiative which mandates that States provide education or job training opportunities to remove clients from welfare rolls.

Not only did these initiatives contribute to the growing demand for services, but they have brought a new type of participants into literacy program -- adults for whom education is mandated (or strongly encouraged in the case of workplace literacy); and to whom sanctions are applied under the Even Start and JOBS programs if they exit before completing required courses; - or for whom rewards are lost, in the case of workplace programs.

The implications for program accountability in these areas are far reaching for a system that has traditionally been open-entry, open-exit.

Despite recent significant Federal increases, matched by State and local governments, funding had not keep pace with demand and it is unlikely it ever will - to the extent necessary. The Federal adult education program reaches 3.6 million; private efforts perhaps a million more. An estimated 23-27 million adult Americans

are in need of services. As the level of skill required for full literacy rises, so too will the need for services.

Therefore, a new Federal policy has emerged for the 90s that seeks to respond to the need for capacity-building with limited resources. It expands the traditional Federal role of statutory administration and public awareness to include efforts aimed at improving program effectiveness, program quality and program accountability - so that services better meet the needs of adult learners, and move them more efficiently, rapidly, and permanently to self-sufficiency and to achieving their goals.

The expanded Federal role will focus on 4 areas in the 90s:

(1) Research

Research, both basic and applied, has been scant in the field of adult education -- and that which has been done has been fragmented.

Federal funds are now being dedicated to identifying, evaluating, validating and disseminating information on promising and successful practices -- research that will assist the field in improving and streamlining services, from

assessment to instruction to counseling, and all that falls within program planning, operation and outcomes.

The new National Institute for Literacy, and the network of State Literacy Resource Centers to be established in 1992 --- along with the National Center on Adult literacy at the University of Pennsylvania --- will have leadership roles, especially in generating field-initiated research. All are supported with Federal funds.

In addition, a $4 million per year program of studies related to AEA programs, conducted by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy, has been underway since 1989. Perhaps the best known of these is the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), the first comprehensive survey to provide a clear picture of the literacy skill levels of Americans, the extent of need for services, and to whom those services should be directed.

The challenge to the Federal government in this policy area will be ensuring that the research agenda is a coordinated and comprehensive one - and that findings are put onto practice.

(2) Technical Assistance

To be of value, research findings must be applied and best practices, identified through research, implemented. The Institute, the National Center and the State Centers will allocate some Federal resources for technical assistance --- largely through various national, regional, and local workshops and conferences. In addition, teacher and administrator and volunteer training has become a high priority for funding under the AEA and hence in public policy. And the Department's Division for Adult Education and Literacy continues to expand its efforts in the conduct of State administrator training; training for workplace and family literacy program development; and in publication and dissemination of materials providing guidelines and models for best practices.

(3) Coordination

This is perhaps the most comprehensive and challenging component of the expanded Federal role, for it seeks to maximize efficiency in use of resources that target the many needs of educationally disadvantaged adults. It is an ongoing process - a means to an end - not a goal in and of

itself. I have alluded to coordination of research. But even more critical is the role of Federal policy in coordination of education, job training and social service programs.

The goal of this policy is, quite simply, the creation of a "client - friendly, student - centered" system -- a coordinated system that will enable:

- First, educationally disadvantaged adults to more easily access and receive all needed services; and

- Secondly, programs to provide the needed services with a minimum of separate, discreet program restrictions; the absence of contradictory Federal reporting and paperwork requirements; and the assistance of compatible and meaningful performance standards and measures across adult education, job training and social service programs - all of whom serve educationally disadvantaged adults. And that brings me to the final Federal policy component,

(4) Accountability

There are no performance standards for the adult education and literacy "system" - in the U.S.

The process for the development of such standards has begun and will likely be the most important outcome of Federal policy in the 90s.

As required under the National Literacy Act amending the AEA, the Department of Education has just developed indicators of program quality -- indicators to be used as models by which State and local programs can judge the success of their efforts. We have brought copies of the publication outlining both the process of development and substance of the indicators.

In the coming year, States will develop and implement their own indicators to evaluate program effectiveness.

We expect that these 2 legislatively-mandated activities will represent the first steps in the creation of performance standards for adult education and literacy and result in the creation of a true "system."

Research, Technical Assistance, Coordination and Accountability - these are the hallmarks of national literacy policy for the 90s in the U.S.

These policy directions will impact on all providers of basic skills services--- in rural, suburban and urban areas. But for urban centers, we expect the impact to be greatest.

For it is in cities that demand is highest, diversity is greatest and, therefore, coordination most needed.